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Elsevier Opens Novel Librarian Roles as E-Delivery Booms

By Peter R. Savage

Librarians aren't just hanging out in the library anymore. They're finding themselves in all kinds of new roles, with their information management skills being tapped for a multitude of tasks. Designing databases, devising search processes for obscure information, acting as point people for customer service, and assisting business units, they've become an important component in the fast-growing field of business intelligence.

Increasingly, this trend lures them from libraries into the commercial world. Among those, publishers are major employers of librarians. In the field of scientific and technical information, Elsevier, the Amsterdam-headquartered market leader, has become a major force in the electronic publishing field in recent years and, not surprisingly, employs increasing numbers of professional librarians in all sorts of roles. They draw on their expertise to better communicate with the library community, help make products more user friendly, and streamline access to a rapidly growing family of offerings.

Take, for example, Karen Hunter, the longest-term employee in Elsevier's New York company. Although she started out as a librarian, she's now senior vice president for strategy. "I have been basically working in one way or another on long-term and strategic planning for most of my career at Elsevier," she says.

But Hunter started out in the stacks. She'd been doing graduate work in history when she began to explore other career alternatives. Working in the Cornell University library from 1967 to 1972, she simultaneously took a library science degree at Syracuse University. Her work at Cornell was in technical services: book and journal acquisitions, cataloging, and managing the gift and exchange program. The shrinkage of collections was becoming evident even in those days: "We began to cut back on second and third copies, and you could see it starting." After leaving Cornell, she joined Baker & Taylor, the major book wholesaler, then took an M.B.A. before joining Elsevier in 1976.

"I always like doing practical, challenging things. For me," says Hunter, "the common thread has been applying library science. It's been useful to me all the way through my career." Citing an example, she says: "I was in sales and marketing at B&T. I was hired to run a new continuity/standing order service, but it was rather badly designed, because it had been put together without talking to librarians. I saw it couldn't work, and did a redesign," she says.

"At Elsevier, where my library background has helped over the years, I've spent a lot of time developing

products and programs with customers. I feel comfortable with customers because I can understand their issues. There's a measure of mutual respect there, aided by being a librarian."

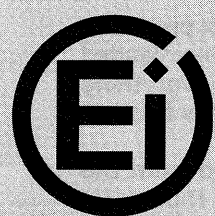
Hunter sees a change in librarians these days. "There may be different groups of people going into it now. In the United States, there's a predominance of people who choose library or information science work in a more deliberate way, with a high degree of public service. It's a role where people are heavily challenged. Even in programs where funding is good, getting enough resources means that librarians have to be very realistic, not idealistic. They have to have practical skills."

She recalls one of her friends, a senior academic librarian, saying, "I never expected to spend my whole career downsizing my collection." But, that's a fact of life these days, she observes. Change is frequent and challenging. "Whatever happens, with the growth of new areas such as distance learning, libraries and publishers have got to learn to make changes more quickly."

John Tagler is also with Elsevier's midtown New York operation at 26th and Park Avenue South, where he is vice president of account development and library marketing. Tagler started out with a master's in library science from New York's Pratt Institute, and at first worked for two years in a small, one-person library at the March of Dimes, whose collection was medical and "science lite" in nature. He then changed hats and moved to IEEE, where he specialized in marketing and promotion to libraries. Joining Elsevier in 1977, he has progressed through a number of positions.

"I joined Elsevier when it was setting up its first library sales department in North America," he recalls. "It came at a time when the company realized it needed people who 'speak the lingo.'" With evident amusement, he recalls an early meeting at which fellow librarians were chatting, using the term "LC" to refer to the Library of Congress. "After forty minutes or so, someone from another publisher who wasn't a librarian spoke up and asked: 'Who is this Elsie, anyway?' Which is just what we were aiming to avoid by having librarians in the program."

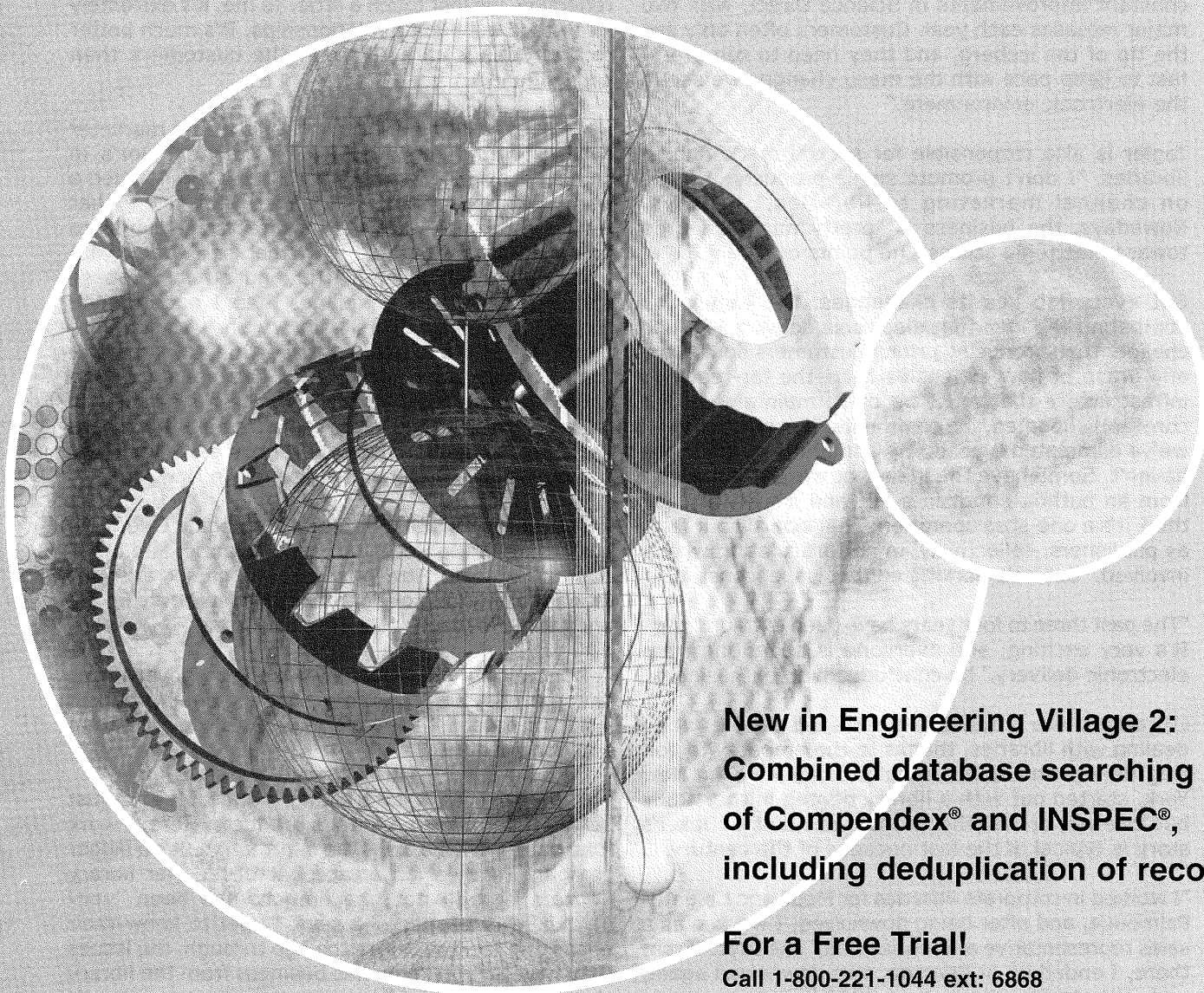
Things have changed dramatically in the past twenty-five years, Tagler emphasizes. "Instead of books and print journals, now I am primarily responsible for a staff who train customers and librarians on using our databases, like Science Direct. We are also beginning to look closely at usage patterns, trying to create benchmarks for different types of publications in



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different settings. It's training with a twist, a synergistic interaction with the librarians and major institutions to identify best practices, develop new approaches in dealing with researchers, and, in the process, help create more effective use of the databases.

"Everyone says Science Direct is intuitive, and it is," he notes. "But many users fail to get the best out of it because they need to be shown how to use the numerous special features. And of course, there are constant improvements in Science Direct, with two major releases each year. Customers often only see the tip of the iceberg, and they need to run pretty fast to keep pace with the many changes we see in the electronic environment."

Tagler is also responsible for special marketing to libraries. "I don't promote single products; I focus on channel marketing to libraries," he says. Nowadays, the business is "pretty much oriented toward electronic access," he points out.

But every job has its challenges. For Tagler, it's combating the idea that electronic delivery is much cheaper than producing print. "Customers don't have any grasp of how expensive it is—the far-reaching infrastructure that must be built, maintained, and constantly updated," he comments. "People just think we've eliminated typesetting and printing, which we haven't. Some have the idea that we just get a disc from an author, pop it in a PC, and it's done. They think it's a one-step operation. That's partly our fault as publishers, collectively, in not articulating what's involved." But he's working on that issue, constantly.

"The past three to four years have been extraordinary. It's very exciting, and everyone is benefiting from electronic delivery," he concludes with enthusiasm.

Librarians are often the best salespeople when dealing with libraries, thanks to the empathy factor. Meg Baker, who works in sales for Elsevier in New York, started out with a library degree in the 1980s but "one way or the other, wandered out of it." Baker's story is typical of the last decades of the century.

"I worked in corporate libraries for Mobil and Colgate-Palmolive, and after being downsized, I worked as a sales representative at Prentice Hall," she says. "From there, I ended up at Pearson, was downsized again, and came to Elsevier in June 2002."

Baker says candidly, "I feel guilty about having a library degree and not using it at times. But here, selling to the library market, I find myself using it again. It helps a lot."

Baker works with the large academic libraries in the Northeast, including such giants as Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth College. "I sell Science Direct and other products that deliver information to libraries

in electronic format. They're very complex products, with equally complex pricing and rules." Baker landed in the deep end: "I started here just as everything was in the process of renewals. It was very hectic!"

She finds that knowing the journal world from the library perspective was a big help. "Even though I'd been away, in trade publishing, so much had changed, yet so much remains the same," she says. "Elsevier's journals business had been run through agents until the electronic business took off, and maybe, on reflection, we lost touch a little. To me, it's extremely important to build up relationships. It's much better to hear things directly from the customers than secondhand."

Baker's colleague Adriana Acosta is also a marketer with a long pedigree. She took a bachelor's in computer science in the United States, then added a degree in library science before returning to her native Mexico to be a library director at a private university for two years. Before that, she worked with a distributor of Silver Platter and other database services. "First I was selling, then I got into the library." From the university library, she was recruited by Silver Platter to sell databases in Latin America, "and I never went back." After five years working Latin American accounts for Silver Platter, she moved to its competitor Ovid in the same market, then spent two years in London doing European sales for Ovid. In August 2001, she joined Elsevier in New York.

Acosta is responsible for Elsevier's Region One, with customers in the Southeast, Mid-Atlantic, and other eastern states. She has a team of six account managers working out of offices in New York, Texas, and Ohio. She, too, sells Science Direct.

"I handle only academic accounts—no government or corporate ones—promoting SD and other products including databases and backfiles. I also do mentoring and coaching."

She finds the job an interesting change. "It's not just selling a database provider's products. Here, I work for a publisher who owns the information. It's a bigger company, with a larger account base." Her library degree, though not used much, has been "very helpful" with clients, she says. "I get to know their needs and feel the things they go through, the issues they have. If you know this business from the library side, it's very useful."

Since it's a worldwide operation, Elsevier also uses librarians' skills inventively in groups outside New York. The Elsevier Engineering Information group (www.ei.org) is based nearby in Hoboken, N.J. Their business focuses on engineering and chemical databases, and has lately undergone a revolution in Web delivery.

Karen Berryman, an information specialist at EI, is, like John Tagler, a New Yorker with a library degree from Pratt Institute. She initially worked as a librarian for Domino Sugar's R&D department and came to EI in 1980. At that time, she was in charge of units that selected and acquired materials, tracked and routed journals through the production departments, entered citation information, cataloged serial and non-serial material, copyedited text, and participated in product development. A busy role, but one that used many basic library skills such as cataloging and online searching.

Berryman left EI for a while to be an R&D librarian with a personal care company that was eventually acquired by another company. But, as she says, "it was good for my database skills. I'd been involved in database searching since the mid-1970s either as a reference librarian or working for a database producer, and got to understand it quite well."

Returning to EI after a thirteen-year gap, she is the "in-house librarian without a library. I act as a liaison between library clients and EI, a kind of sounding board. They tell me what they want and don't want, and I also help them with training on use of the products. I know the other databases quite well, so I know how our offerings appear on other platforms and can see, for example, how Engineering Village 2 appears compared with how the same material looks on STN."

Berryman says she spends "a lot of time talking to library clients, so we can get direct feedback on changes. Are we making their lives easier or tougher? It helps to speak the same language so I can give them objective advice."

EI has been actively upgrading Engineering Village 2 for some time. They are also working on adding the kind of features available on EV2 to its corresponding chemical product and paper products, ChemVillage and Paper Village 2. "We're trying to present the databases on the same basis—not identical, but the more they look and feel alike, the more comfortable the customers are. It's also easier to maintain and improve."

Imelda Bernstein also works at EI—not in sales or marketing, but a nuts-and-bolts design role. Her librarianship connection is a bit more tangential. "I've never worked as a librarian," she admits, though she did pick up a library science degree at the University of Maryland in 1994. "I trained as a reference librarian, so I learned about online searching, abstracts, indexes, Dialog. But at that time, UM was really excited about the Internet. My last semester, I took an interdisciplinary class on electronic multimedia products."

And that's where she headed. She had a six-month internship at *U.S. News & World Report*, where she

worked on a CD-ROM product listing best college choices. Bernstein's role was very hands-on: She converted mountains of information on 1,400 colleges into electronic format and developed a search engine, resulting in a very successful "all-custom" product. Next, she helped build *USN&WR's* Web site as associate producer. "The site was a big hit in 1996—sophisticated for its time, and it made money!"

After stints with a Web consulting firm and PBS's *NewsHour* with Jim Lehrer, she joined EI. "My experience with how people search and the development of indexes, search strategies, etc. is very useful to me."

She's been working on the latest release of Engineering Village 2, which includes cross-searching between EI's Compendex® and IEE's INSPEC®, two databases that are "very important to customers." She was also involved with another EI product, ChemVillage, which includes Chimica, a new database seen as an "economical alternative to Chemical Abstracts."

But Bernstein isn't closeted with her keyboard. "We're continually adding new features based on customer feedback," she notes. In-house "I'm a systems analyst, liaising between the business side, which needs to articulate requirements, and the technology side, for design of the interface and questions for the technical team. There's only one of me—EI is a pretty small organization, and rather self-contained. What's been interesting to me, after being 'out of the library' from 1995 to 2000, is to come here and use my education as a librarian to help build products for librarians and their users."

Daviess Menefee has a quite different role from these other former librarians. He's based in Columbus, Ohio, having graduated and worked as a librarian at Rice University in Houston and then The Ohio State University. After leaving academia, he worked for ten years for OCLC, a company that provides library services to nonprofits, in nearby Dublin, Ohio. Working for the broad run of Elsevier units, he's director of library relations for the Americas. "I liaise with librarians and attend conferences, working on the company's positioning and policy. I get the message out on a personal level and deal with the queries posted on listservs."

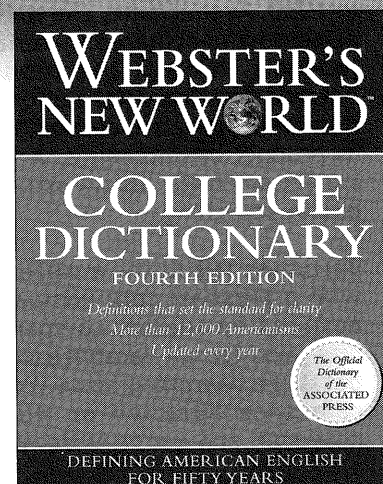
A lot of what Menefee does involves in-house collaboration. "I try to get together with the various components of the company to address an issue. I advise them on communications, Web sites, printed materials, etc., and our library outreach program." Compared to regular librarianship, "it's much more varied; the pace is faster. As a university librarian for eight years, things went much more slowly. There's lots of creativity in this work!"

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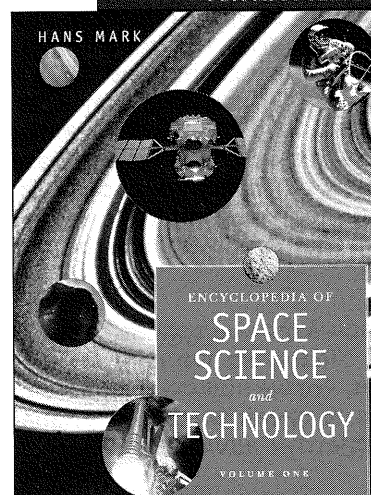
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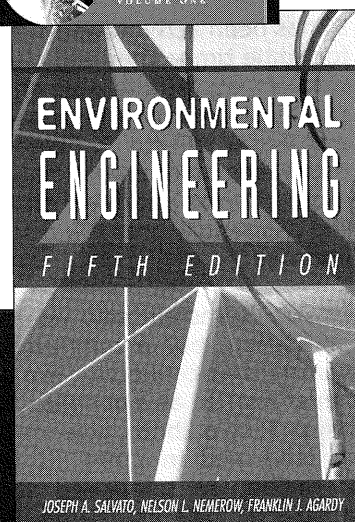
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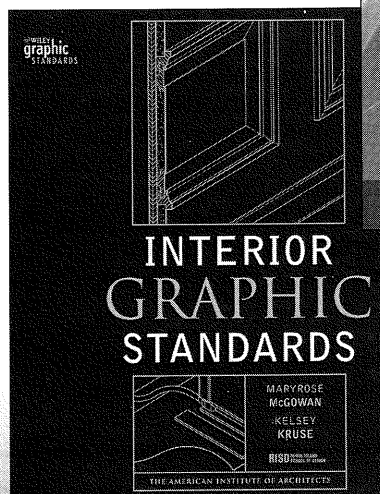
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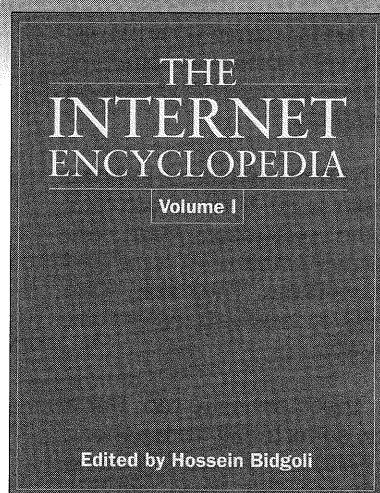
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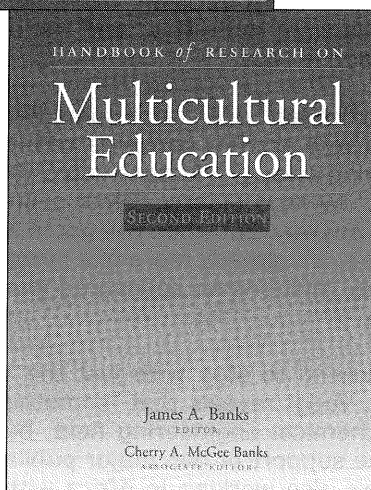
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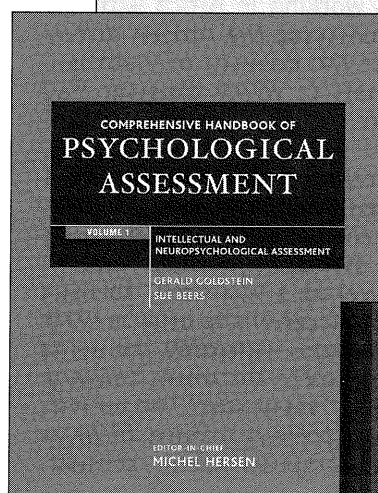
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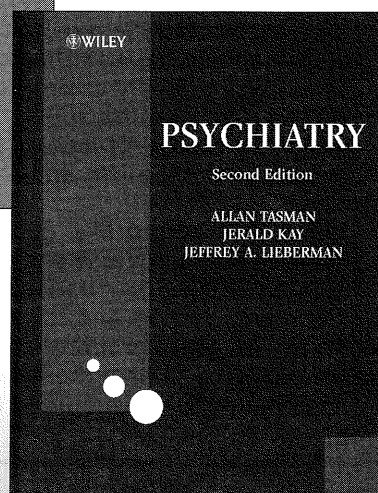
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"I'm working across all boundaries," Menefee adds. "There are only two of us in Elsevier who do library relations, and I'm also closely affiliated with marketing and sales."

Of course, Elsevier is a Dutch company by parentage, headquartered in Amsterdam. And there you'll find Leo Voogt, who has one of the most fascinating jobs for a trained librarian. He took his library degree at a vocational college, and later spent six years at prestigious Leiden University, specializing in history and informatics. Leaving there in 1988, he spent some time with the Netherlands National Library before becoming secretary-general of the influential International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), where he served for seven years in the 1990s.

You might not think there was any "up" direction from there, but Voogt achieved it by joining Elsevier. "I'd been intrigued by the commercial world, having worked in the not-for-profit area. And I was interested in working for a commercial publisher. Elsevier was one of the most interesting: It's big, it has a reputation for high quality, it's highly visible and was becoming a mover and shaker in the electronic publishing business and the library community. If there was a place I would have liked to make a difference, that was it."

Voogt had been talking with Elsevier CEO Derk Haank, having observed how Elsevier had started to "change the process and make libraries stakeholders." He joined at Haank's behest, at a time when the company was taking a proactive role in delivering electronic biomedical journals to the developing world. "A World Health Organization (WHO) meeting had already laid the groundwork for this idea. And it was a time when the whole of the United Nations family was opening up to the world," he says. Voogt's role became that of a kind of international ambassador (his actual job designation is library relations director) to make this dream happen.

"It's a rewarding job," he enthuses. "I talk to other publishers, the WHO, sales and other colleagues in house, in trying to make this idea a reality. And it is. Collectively, we offer a live, Web-based product with 2,000 journals, for institutions in sixty developing countries. And it's free!"

Elsevier contributes about 600 of its titles to the venture, including such key journals as *Cell* and *The Lancet*. "There's been a good uptake in the developing world, though it brings home to us that there's a long way to go with the Internet in those areas. But it's a big improvement over what we could do in print," he remarks.

Voogt's office is now involved in the second phase of the project, in which countries with higher GNPs will be offered a service similar to the existing WHO service, at "deeply discounted prices." Having solved

the technical problems, it plans to work with the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on a similar concept, with libraries paying according to their means. He's counting on some interagency cooperation within the UN family—once a rarity—to facilitate the product's being very similar in structure and to use the same "backroom" for user ID validation and other housekeeping issues.

Voogt works extensively with other publishers to bring WHO (or FAO in due course) what they need. "It's interesting to see how smaller publishers react. You have to realize that some have small print runs and are very focused on niche markets. They ask, 'Can we afford to make this free in markets where we ought to be making money?'"

He concedes, "For Elsevier, that's an issue too. But it has less impact than for, say, some small francophone publisher in the agriculture field. But it comes to being very much a down-to-earth decision. Here, we had the CEO saying 'We want to do this,' and the board agreeing. That made it easy."

But "free" or even "cheap" does raise some hackles in the industry. "There are few concerns within the industry about giving away products to sub-Saharan African countries," he says bluntly. "Most countries can't afford to pay anyway. But when you get to North Africa, the Maghreb, it's already more of a struggle." The issue of society relations for sponsored journals isn't trivial either.

Elsevier doesn't intend to stop with just the WHO and FAO projects. Voogt reveals that "something is brewing" in the chemical engineering field, but he needs to enlist the support of two major publishers in that sector. He's also working in Africa with the World Bank, which is sponsoring the African Virtual University, a program for the delivery of math and computer science journals in which Elsevier had participated for two years.

Recognizing that broadband service is not a widespread feature in the developing world, Elsevier is also working with an Italian physics institute, ICTP, based in Trieste. Seeing that print journals were no solution either, ICTP has set up a "low-tech" solution that allows users in remote locations to browse titles in e-mail and have the material delivered the same way. "We're deeply committed to electronic delivery, so this is an interim solution," Voogt says. The service, called the Electronic Journal Delivery Service, involves largely physics, math, and computer science content.

Does that sound like enough work for one guy? Maybe. But Voogt also sits on the board of the newly minted Elsevier Foundation, intended to "engage with librarians, authors and editors," which is getting ready to accept grant proposals. "For example, right now, we're trying to help the Artificial Intelligence library in Edinburgh, which burned down in December 2002

and lost everything. We also sponsor developing-world participation in high-level courses on electronic publishing and the digital library."

There's a wide spectrum of destinies for librarians, as anyone can see. Chances are these kinds of career options will blossom further as we move into an almost exclusively electronic future for information.

What major companies like Elsevier are doing now will strongly influence future decisions and practices of other publishers, opening up all kinds of new roles for the librarian.

Peter R. Savage is ideas guy and principal of The Thinking Companies, Inc., a competitive intelligence and technology communications company based in Falmouth, Maine (<http://www.thinkingenergy.com>).

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